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Fore-Sight

Ventriloquists exploit a phenomenon known as “visual capture,” whereby information obtained visually predominates over conflicting data from another sense. We perceive the dummy to be speaking since we see the dummy’s mouth moving, in spite of our ears telling us that the words are coming from the ventriloquist. Vision is the primary sense for obtaining information. More brain tissue is devoted to processing visual stimuli than information from any other sense. Accordingly, vision is the sensory ability that people say they would least want to lose.

Approximately 1 in 28 adults over the age of 40 live with vision loss or total blindness. The actual number of people with visual impairment is expected to double in the next 30 years. Furthermore, it is estimated that at least half the cases of blindness are preventable. There are a number of things a person can do to reduce the risk of vision loss. Perhaps the most obvious steps are protecting ones’ eyes from injuries that can be caused by the sun’s ultraviolet rays, or when operating machinery that can propel objects into the eyes (e.g., saws, weed trimmers, etc.).

However, the leading causes of vision loss are age-related eye diseases, not eye injury (although eye trauma is one risk factor for some eye diseases). These include cataract, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy. What can one do to reduce risk for such eye diseases? Not surprisingly, the very behaviors that reduce risk for other illnesses reduce risk for eye disease... healthy diet,

physical activity, and avoiding smoking. Depending upon the eye disease, these behaviors can have a direct preventative benefit, or indirect benefit through the management or prevention of the chronic health problems which themselves increase risk for vision loss, including diabetes and hypertension.

While the complexity of the human vision system and the human body in general can be mind-boggling, it is refreshing to remind ourselves that health-promoting behaviors for numerous body systems are the same. What's good for the heart, lungs, and brain is also good for our eyes!

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